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Intervention by the Chief Commissioner at the Opening for Signature Ceremony of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities

Intervention
at the
Opening for Signature Ceremony
of the
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
delivered by
Ms. Jennifer Lynch, Q.C.
Chief Commissioner of the
Canadian Human Rights Commission
on behalf of the
International Coordinating Committee
of National Human Rights Institutions

March 30, 2007
New York

Mr. Chairman:

I am the Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

I am speaking as the Chairperson of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions on behalf of our 53 member institutions.

The ICC and our member institutions have as our focus the creation, strengthening and accrediting of National Institutions that are dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights.

We congratulate all states, institutions of the UN, and the international disability community that have worked so hard to bring about this historic day.

Finally, the veil on disability in international human rights law is being lifted.

The invisibility of disability in international and domestic laws is one of the critical reasons for this Convention.

L'occasion est particulièrement mémorable pour les institutions nationales des droits de la personne.

This occasion is especially momentous for National Human Rights Institutions. NHRIs participated in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee as independent human rights institutions speaking on their own behalf through the ICC.

Ce travail marquait la première fois que des institutions nationales ont pu jouer un rôle dans la rédaction d'une convention sur les droits de la personne.

The signing of the Convention is just the beginning of making the Convention a reality in the lives of all the citizens of the world.

Last week at a meeting of the ICC in Geneva, we considered what steps National Institutions should take to give life to the Convention. We resolved to play an active role in all aspects of implementation.

In particular, the ICC accepts the specific responsibility in Article 33.2 which tasks National Institutions with the role of 'promoting, protecting and monitoring' the implementation of the Convention at the domestic level.

National Institutions 'promote' through education. We 'protect' by ensuring complaints mechanisms or by supporting complaints in other venues such as tribunals.

We 'monitor' by pointing to gaps in domestic law that need to be made good by reference to international law.

Sixty years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt, and my countryman John Humphrey were two of the principal drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

That important and historic Declaration made no direct reference to people with disabilities.

Yet I think both Mrs. Roosevelt, the spouse of a man with a disability, and Mr. Humphrey who himself had a disability, would readily recognize that what we are doing here today is furthering the vision of the Universal Declaration's first article: *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*

The roles of the International Coordinating Committee and our member National Institutions in the development and adoption of this Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – and our future roles in implementations – are examples of our collective potential to make a difference in the advancement of human rights around the world.

Thank you.

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